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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
27 April 1965

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

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HIGHLIGHTS

Saigon reportedly has hedged on its willingness to participate in any conference on Cambodian neutrality. This may reflect opposition in certain Catholic and military circles even to indirect negotiations with the Communists. On the military front, a government search-and-destroy operation in Quang Tri Province was successful, government forces have uncovered large Viet Cong supply caches near Saigon, and US aircraft have attacked a supply base in Vinh Binh Province.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:

A US Marine patrol was ambushed near Da Nang air base today (Para. 1). A government search-and-destroy operation in Quang Tri Province has produced favorable initial results (Para. 2). Government ground forces have reportedly uncovered large Viet Cong supply caches immediately north and northwest of Saigon (Para. 3). US aircraft have destroyed a guerrilla supply base in Vinh Binh Province (Para. 4). MACV reports that Viet Cong activity during 17-24 April remained at a low level, both in incidence and intensity (Para. 9). Antiaircraft artillery may now be in the hands of the Viet Cong (Para. 15).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam: A reported government statement, hedging on South Vietnam's willingness to participate in any conference on Cambodian neutrality, appears to reflect Premier Quat's concern over a possible reaction in certain Catholic and military circles should he appear embarked on indirect negotiations with the Communists (Para. 1-2). Military trials of persons implicated in the 19 February coup attempt have begun in Saigon (Para. 3).

III. Military Developments in North Vietnam: US and VNAF aircraft, carrying out armed reconnaissance strikes on 27 April, damaged bridges and a ferry (Paras. 1-3).

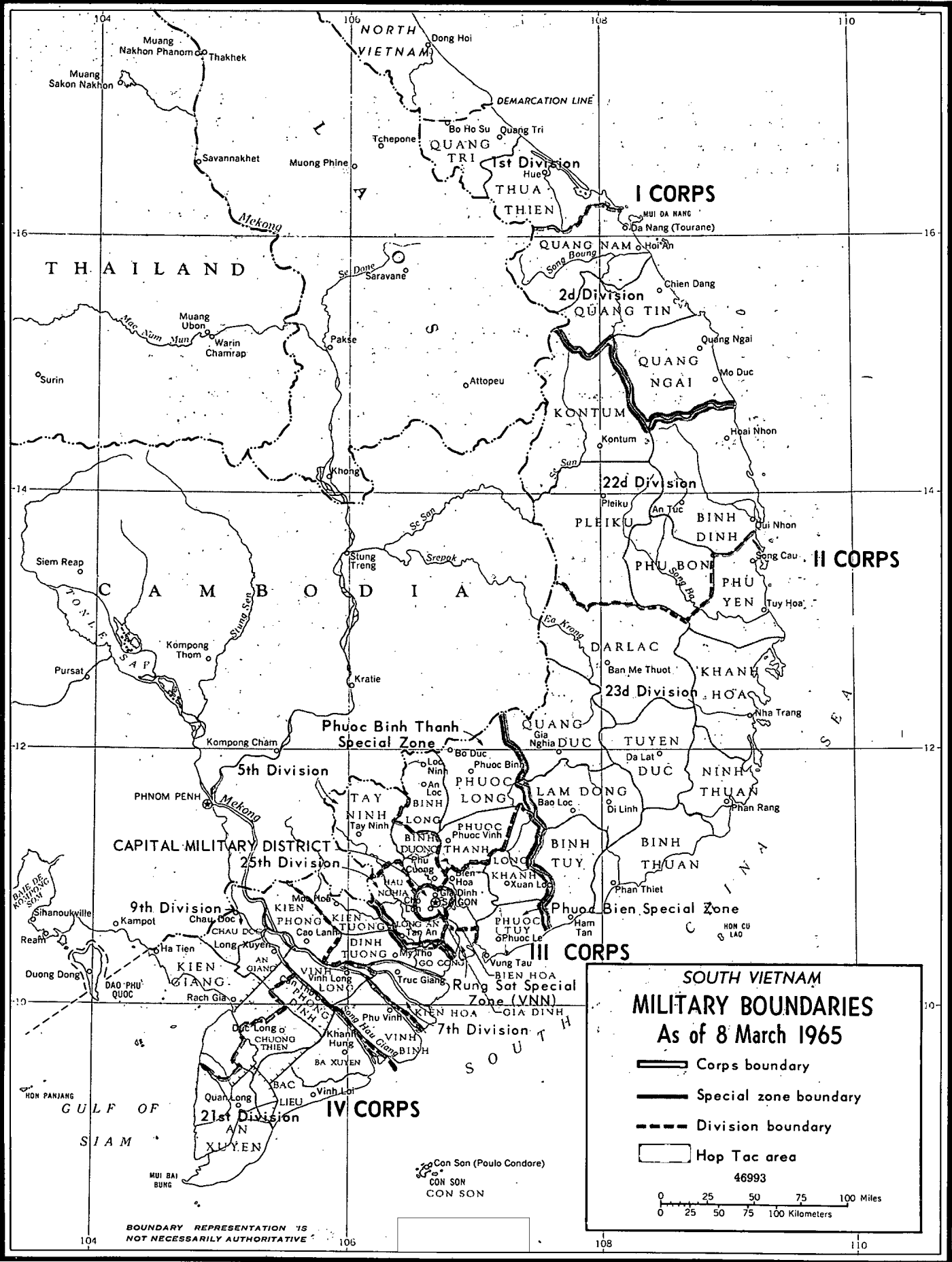
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V. Communist Political Developments: Peiping propaganda continues to play up Western press reports alleging popular opposition in the US to American involvement in Vietnam (Para. 1).

VI. Other Major Aspects: The Indian Government plans to communicate formal proposals for negotiation in Vietnam to "interested parties" in the next few days. These proposals call for policing the border between North and South Vietnam with an Afro-Asian force (Paras. 1 and 2).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The press reports that Viet Cong snipers today ambushed a platoon-size patrol of American marines eight miles west of Da Nang air base. One marine was slightly wounded in the 30-minute fire fight. Elsewhere, a South Vietnamese militia unit reportedly killed an estimated 34 guerrillas today in a clash 30 miles northeast of Saigon. Another militia unit was ambushed yesterday by the Viet Cong in the central highland province of Darlac. Friendly casualties were placed at two killed and 15 wounded, including a US Special Forces adviser, while the Communists suffered an estimated 32 killed.

2. A large-scale government operation initiated on 25 April on a beach area directly east of Quang Tri city, in Quang Tri Province, to locate and destroy the 804th main force Viet Cong battalion and two local force Viet Cong platoons has resulted in initial Communist losses of 47 killed, 23 captured, 130 suspects detained, and 16 weapons seized. The only friendly casualty reported thus far is a VNAF pilot who was killed when he failed to pull up safely from a bombing run. Government forces participating in the operation include Popular and Regional Force units, elements of two junk divisions, a battery of 105/155-mm. howitzers, and close air support aircraft. The operation is continuing.

3. Additional press reports state that two government battalions today uncovered a Viet Cong supply cache 20 miles north of Saigon containing enough uniforms to outfit two battalions of enemy troops. The dump also contained 120 tons of rice, 30 tons of salt, a supply of gasoline, truck tires, a number of radio batteries, and a generator. Government forces in another search-and-destroy operation 50 miles northwest of Saigon yesterday reportedly uncovered 17,000 pounds of green rice, 8,000 pounds of white rice, and a supply of gasoline.

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4. Twenty USAF A-1E Skyraiders and 11 USAF B-57 jet bombers bombed and strafed a Viet Cong supply cache and offshore sampans near the mouth of the Bassac River, in Vinh Binh Province, on 25 April. Pilots reported 101 structures destroyed, six sampans, and a supply cache destroyed.

5. MACV's military report for 25 April shows 54 Viet Cong-initiated incidents, three of which occurred during the reporting period. No major new actions were reported, as the Viet Cong continued to emphasize small-scale terrorism, harassment, and sabotage.

6. The level of government-initiated ground operations of battalion strength or larger remained unchanged. Ten operations were initiated and ten terminated, leaving 25 continuing on 25 April. Only the operation in Quang Tri Province, (discussed in paragraph 2), produced significant results.

7. Company-size or smaller operations conducted on 25 April declined to 2,214. Fifteen contacts were made with the Viet Cong, with enemy losses listed as 36 killed, two captured, and 17 weapons. Government units sustained casualties of four killed and ten wounded.

8. Pilot reports from USAF/VNAF combat air operations conducted against enemy concentrations throughout South Vietnam on 25 April estimate 38 Viet Cong killed and 71 structures destroyed. These results do not include USAF aerial attacks in Vinh Binh Province, discussed in paragraph 4.

9. [redacted] Viet Cong-initiated terrorist and military activity continued to reflect a low level of incidence and intensity. The number of armed attacks and ambushes declined from nine to five, including one possible battalion-size assault in Kien Hoa Province on 23 April. While casualties on both sides increased during the period, most were sustained as the result of government-initiated operations. Viet Cong main force units continued to avoid contact, and reacted only when ARVN units entered Communist-controlled areas.

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A statistical comparison of last week's guer-rilla activity with that of the previous week fol-lows:

<u>Time Period</u>	<u>Attacks</u>	<u>Terrorism</u>	<u>Sabotage</u>	<u>Propaganda</u>	<u>Anti- Aircraft</u>	<u>Total Incidents</u>
10-17 Apr	9	332	52	13	63	469
17-24 Apr	5	240	25	33	50	353

10. Road conditions remained unchanged with Routes 14, 19, and 21 open, Route 7 closed west of Tuy Hoa, and Route 1 open except for the stretch between Ninh Hoa in Khanh Hoa Province, and the Quang Ngai-Binh Dinh border. The coastal railroad remained closed between Nha Trang and Da Nang.

11. Government-initiated operations once again were responsible for provoking virtually all of the major engagements with the Viet Cong during the week. The majority of these were conducted in relatively remote areas under enemy control. As the result of the stepped-up pace in operational activity, the kill ratio increased to an unprecedented 6:1 over the Viet Cong; however, almost half the reports on enemy killed were based on unsupported estimates rather than actual body counts. The confirmed kill ratio remains 3:1 in favor of friendly forces.

12. MACV,  has provided a more complete account of the fighting around Viet An in Quang Tin Province last week. The operation, using six battalions, was launched on 18 April with the objective of breaking the Viet Cong hold on the area between the province capital of Tam Ky and Viet An district post near the Quang Ngai border. Although the friendly forces were well provided with artillery and air support, neither was used during the critical attack phase when the Viet Cong launched a two-battalion counterattack. The Communists employed 4.2-mm. heavy mortars for the first known time, in conjunction with recoilless rifles, 81-mm. mortars, and machine guns. The initial shock of the counterattack turned into panic when two

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armored cavalry troops broke off their attack against orders. An attacking Vietnamese marine battalion followed suit and, in less than an hour, the remaining government battalions withdrew in disorder. Only desultory efforts were made over the next few days to revive the ARVN offensive, but no further contact was made. The rebel force sustained confirmed losses of 53 killed, with unsupported estimates of up to 297 more killed by air, artillery, and ground fire. Friendly losses were relatively high (26 killed, 86 wounded, 28 missing, and 29 weapons) but not enough to justify breaking off the attack or retreating. Investigations and critiques were subsequently conducted, resulting in the dismissal of two commanders.

13. ARVN casualties during the period 17-24 April totaled 422 (102 KIA, 260 WIA, and 60 MIA/captured), an increase from the previous week's total of 357 casualties (90 KIA, 238 WIA, and 29 MIA/captured). ARVN weapons losses numbered 117, a sharp decline from the 315 reported lost last week.

14. During 17-24 April, the Viet Cong sustained an estimated 755 casualties (607 KIA and 148 captured), considerably more than the previous week's total of 321 casualties (260 KIA and 61 captured). Government forces captured 137 weapons (none crew-served), an increase in comparison with the 80 weapons (two crew-served) seized last week.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. According to a Reuters report, unnamed "government sources" have stated that South Vietnam is not yet prepared to commit itself to attend a conference on Cambodian neutrality until it has studied the terms of reference for such a conference and the reaction of Cambodia. The statement represents a retreat from the more amenable position put forth earlier by South Vietnam's foreign minister and probably reflects the concern of Premier Quat over the possible domestic repercussions of participation.

2. Ambassador Taylor has commented that agreement to attend a conference on Cambodia would at a minimum subject the Quat government to pressure from both Catholic and military circles and could cause the government's downfall. These elements, some of whom are now hostile to Quat or suspicious of his ties to the Buddhists, might well interpret Saigon's participation as evidence that Quat is prepared to sell out to the Communists, and react desperately. Attendance at the conference might also provide an excuse for similar action by southern "regionalists" who consider the government "northern-oriented," or by opportunistic politicians seeking an avenue to power.

3. The growing influence of I Corps commander General Thi in recent administrative appointments in his area is indicated by a report of the US consul in Hue. In Quang Ngai Province, four new district chiefs and a regimental commander are Thi's men, and the anti-Thi province chief fears that he is slated for removal. Thi reportedly wants to replace him with a civilian who only recently moved to the province and who appears to lack administrative experience. A Buddhist and a Nationalist (VNQDD) Party member, this candidate is reported seeking authority to name his own deputy for security and his subordinate district chiefs, and to assume personal control of provincial paramilitary forces.

4. Military trials for participants in the abortive 19 February coup began in Saigon today. Nineteen of the 45 defendants, including ring-

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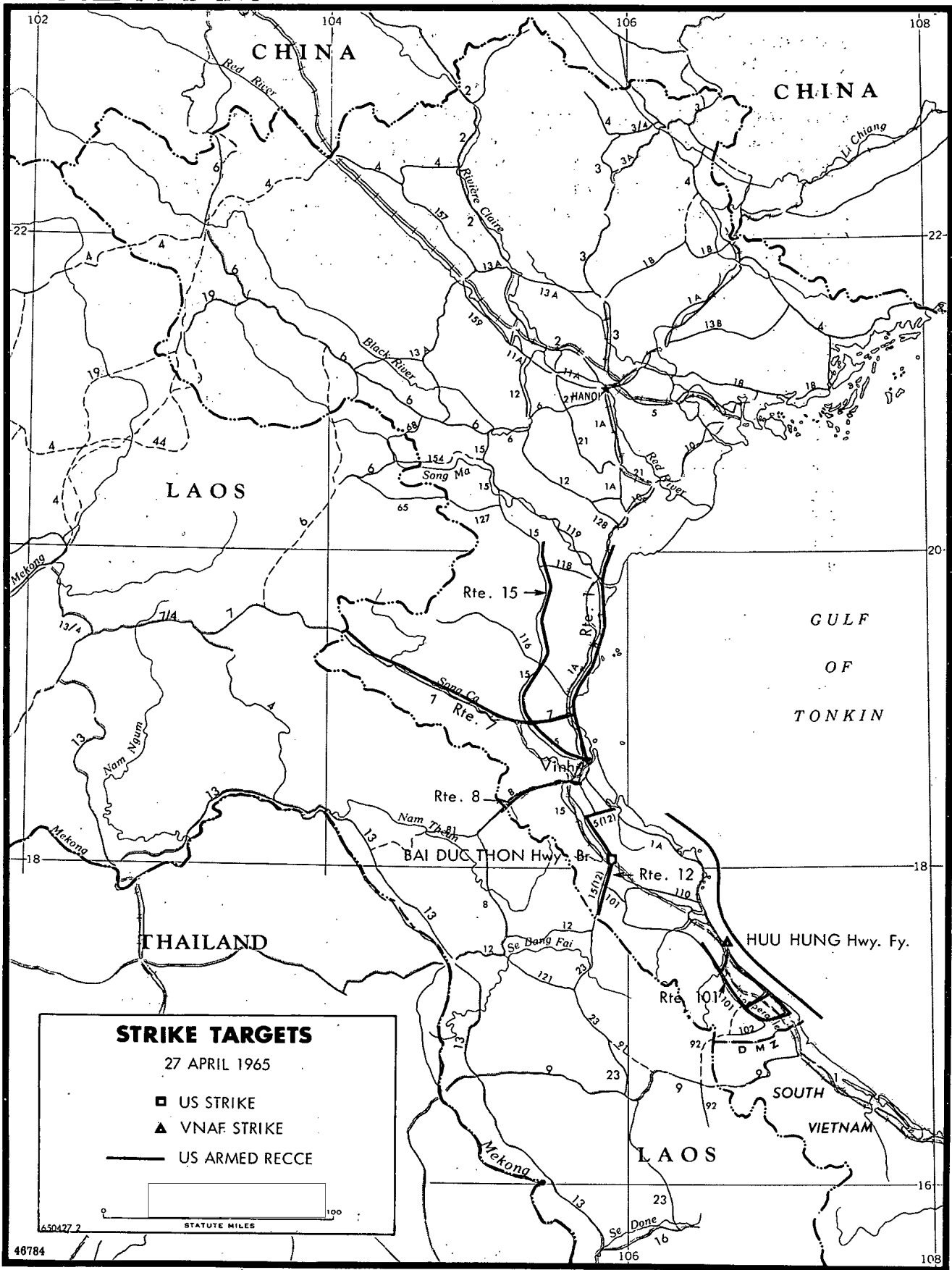
leaders Colonel Thao and General Phat, are being tried in absentia. The military court, although under III Corps, is presided over by IV Corps commander General Quang, and death penalties are possible. Although there are rumors that at least some of the defendants will be treated leniently, the composition of the military judges--many of whom are considered pro-Buddhist by Catholic militants--may further upset those Catholics who sympathized with the coup attempt.

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NORTH VIETNAM



III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. US and VNAF armed route reconnaissance on 27 April found few targets, but inflicted some damage on bridges and a ferry.

2. VNAF armed reconnaissance of lateral roads between Routes 1 and 101 south of Dong Hoi saw no targets along the route, but damaged the approaches of the Huu Hung ferry and damaged a nearby building. USN armed reconnaissance along the coast from Ha Tinh to the DMZ found no DRV patrol boats, but inflicted damage on a secondary bridge along the route. USAF armed reconnaissance of Route 12 attacked the Bai Duc Thon highway bridge south but inflicted only slight damage. A new bridge constructed underwater was observed two miles northeast. Truck tracks leading to and from the bridge indicate it may be in use. USN armed route reconnaissance along Route 15 from Vinh to the 20th parallel damaged two trucks and attacked nine POL tanks. The tanks were hit but did not explode; the pilots report that they may be under construction. A highway bridge over a levee was attacked but the damage is unknown. A USN mission along Route 1 from Dong Phuong to Vinh reported no targets.

3. Three USAF night armed reconnaissance missions covered Routes 7, 8, and 12. No targets were sighted on Route 7; on Route 8 the road was bombed and a wooden bridge attacked with unknown damage, and on Route 12 sections of the road were also bombed.

4. Armed route reconnaissance missions on 26 April also report a lack of targets. A USN mission along Route 1 and the adjacent railroad from Dong Phuong to Vinh reported no targets, as did a USN mission along Route 15 from Vinh to the 20th parallel. Night missions report that lights were extinguished in towns along the route as the aircraft approached.

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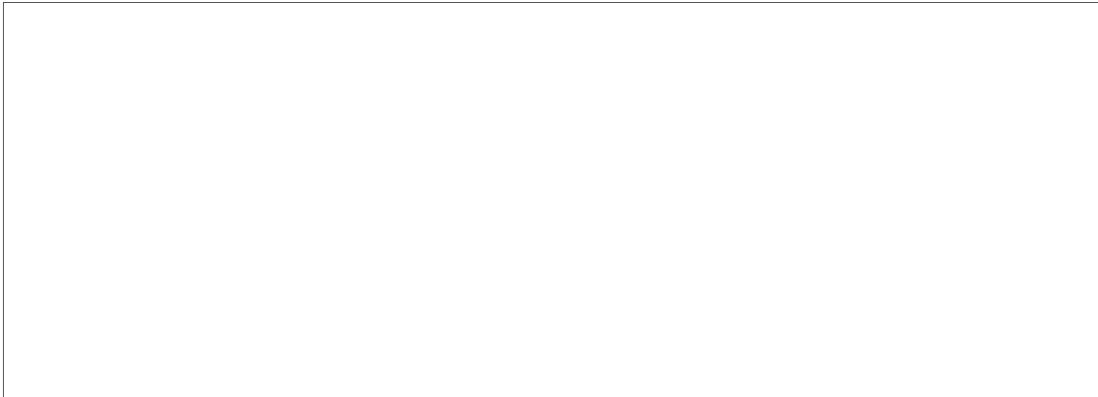
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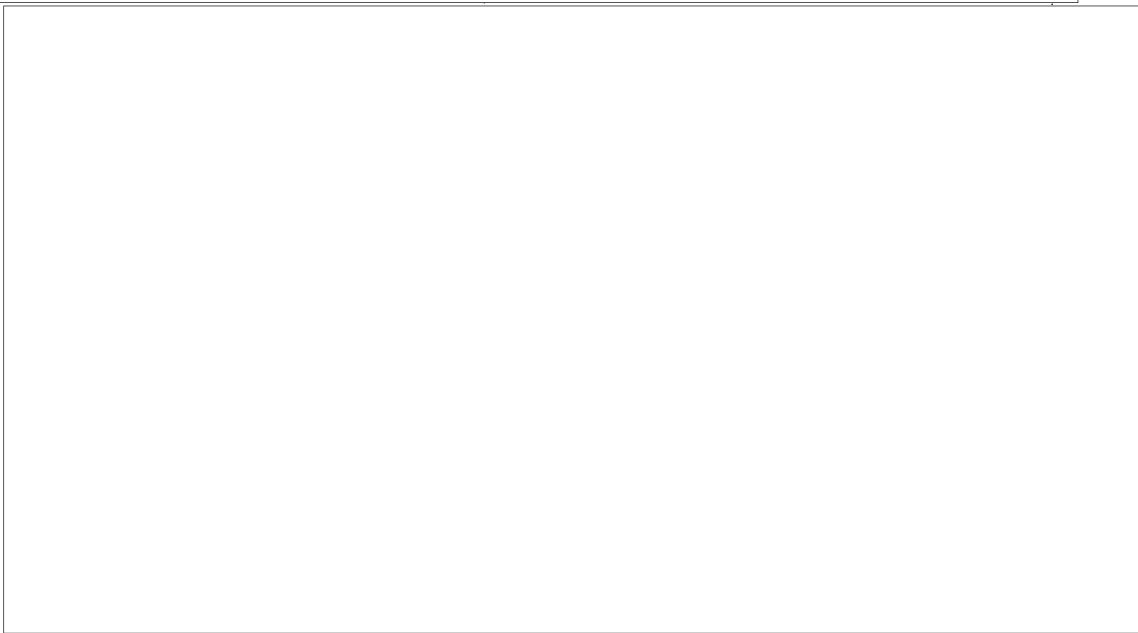
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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. Peiping is exploiting Western press reports to create the impression of large-scale popular dissatisfaction in the United States over American involvement in Vietnam. The most extreme Peiping statement along this line thus far appeared on 27 April when the Ta Kung Pao "Commentator" asserted that "stepped-up US aggression abroad has aggravated the class struggle between the US monopoly capital and the broad masses of the American people." "Commentator" claimed that protest demonstrations by the American people "on a scale rarely seen before in the United States embracing intellectuals, clergymen, pacifists, and housewives as well as working people plus the Negro masses" are calling for the withdrawal of US forces from Vietnam.

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VI. OTHER MAJOR ASPECTS

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1. An Indian Foreign Ministry official [redacted]

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[redacted] has told the American Embassy in New Delhi that Indian proposals for negotiations on Vietnam have already been accepted by Nasir, who was to have discussed them with Tito on 26 April, and that they would be formally communicated to interested parties in the next few days. These proposals, made by the Indian President in a press interview on 24 April, called for (a) a cessation of hostilities in Vietnam, (b) the policing of the boundary between North and South by an Afro-Asian force, and (c) the maintenance of present boundaries "so long as people desire it." Policing, according to present thinking, would cover all access routes between North and South Vietnam, including those through Laos.

2. [redacted]

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Radhakrishnan's conversations with Mikoyan and Jacob Malik on 18 April led them to anticipate that the Soviets would welcome the proposals. He added that the Indian Government believed that there had been a significant shift in Hanoi during the past month away from Peiping toward Moscow and that he expected Hanoi to support the proposals.

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